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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Chairman Smith, distinguished Representatives, and fellow guests of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to highlight the value of the longstanding relationship between Faith-Based Organizations and the American people in bringing aid to Africa.

My name is Ken Isaacs, and I am Vice-President of Programs for Samaritan's Purse, a Christian International Relief Organization. Samaritan's Purse was founded over 35 years ago to bring emergency assistance to people living in poverty, famine, disease, and war. Today, we are bringing desperately needed aid such as food, medical care, vocational programming, and emergency shelter to millions of people in over 100 countries. Our current budget is \$256 million. Less than 3% of this figure comes from U.S. government support. We have ongoing funding relationships with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through the following: the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Food for Peace, the Bureau of Global Health, American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA), and various country mission offices. We have also received support from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Globally, we have a staff of about 2,500 people, including 500 Americans. Approximately 2,100 of these work in foreign locations, including members of my own family who are serving in Sudan. These are committed, highly trained professionals who, because of their Christian faith, are moved to bring relief to suffering people. They frequently accept assignments that put them in difficult and dangerous situations without regard for personal safety or financial gain. They are motivated by the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He suffered death on the cross to bring eternal life to those who believe in Him. They also believe they have a responsibility to share this Good News with others while fulfilling the Biblical mandate to help people in need.

Regardless of one's religious beliefs, what we do has significant human meaning. Even in strongly Muslim countries such as Afghanistan and Indonesia, we have received the full support of host governments who value our compassion for their people and the excellent quality of our work. Though we make no effort to hide our Christian identity and faith, we respect local laws and customs. We have never used government money to support evangelism or religious activities. We are fully accountable to every donor, including the U.S. government.

I have worked for Samaritan's Purse since 1988, serving in poor, war-torn, and disaster-ridden countries throughout the world. I lived with my family under the communist regime in Ethiopia during the last three years of their civil war. I have traveled to Sudan more than 100 times over the course of my career. In 2004, I resigned from Samaritan's Purse to accept the position of Director of OFDA. I am proud to have led OFDA because

it is the personification of the best qualities of the American people—compassion and generosity. It deserves more support and recognition from all of us.

In December 2005, I returned to Samaritan's Purse. Because of my experience in both worlds, I have a unique perspective on the relationship between the U.S. government and Faith-Based Organizations. The government needs to engage more vigorously with Faith-Based Organizations, and these organizations need to develop a better understanding and appreciation of working with government agencies.

The U.S. Government has a long history of working with some Christian organizations. Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, World Relief, and Food for the Hungry International are a few of the organizations that have established a comfortable partnership with government agencies. I believe that other Christian organizations should also have the opportunity to establish the same kind of ongoing partnerships. No qualified organization should be excluded on the basis of their statement and practice of faith. While this is not the policy of the U.S. government, it is too often the reality. Congress needs to ensure that the implementation of the President's Faith-Based Initiative is not thwarted because of the personal prejudices of individuals within government agencies.

Christian organizations have years of practical experience in addressing the physical needs of suffering people. We are guided by the Christian imperative to deal with a person's—and a community's—emotional and spiritual needs. The Bible challenges us to love others unconditionally, to forgive, and to care for those in need, even our enemies. This is why Christians have always been at the forefront of providing humanitarian aid. History is full of examples of personal sacrifice by people of faith such as Mother Teresa.

With more than 25 offices in Africa and a network of tens of thousands of pastors and churches, Samaritan's Purse has helped millions of impoverished people. Our work includes feeding programs in Uganda, Sudan, Mozambique, Liberia, and Kenya. We support 121 hospitals in 29 African countries, and we send more than 200 doctors to the continent each year to provide critical medical care and professional training. Today, I will highlight two of our Africa programs: our relief projects in Sudan and our work in fighting AIDS.

Our hearts break for the people of Sudan. In 1997, at the height of the civil war between north and south, we opened a hospital in the southern town of Lui. We had a moral compunction to go where the need was, even when access was denied by the Government of Sudan. This hospital is the primary healthcare facility for over 400,000 people. Two years later, during the siege of the Nuba Mountains, we delivered emergency food aid to starving people at great risk to our staff and aircraft. With private support, we are helping to restore communities by rebuilding churches and schools throughout southern Sudan.

In 2003, we began working in East Sudan in partnership with Food for Peace and OFDA. The Beja, a closed Muslim tribe, allowed us to distribute food and provide medical treatment in their communities. We were able to build a hospital for the Beja in this rebel-held town of Hamesh Koreb. On January 10, 2006, the Government of Sudan's

armed forces overran the area, and we were forced to flee. Despite the impassioned pleas of the Beja people for the Christians to return—and our own persistent efforts—we have not received permission from the Government of Sudan to continue our work there.

We are heavily involved in relief work in Darfur. I want to congratulate Congress—and you Mr. Chairman and Mr. Payne for your leadership—for passing the Darfur Accountability Act. We appreciate this important legislation to support the people of Sudan in their struggle for freedom. In partnership with OFDA, we are providing relief supplies and implementing agricultural and protection programs that benefit more than 350,000 people. We are also working with the World Food Program to feed over 125,000 people per month in Darfur. We are UNICEF's major implementing partner in south Darfur, and together we have built more than 40 schools.

While the world focuses on Darfur, we must not forget people in other areas of Sudan. The east is under heavy persecution with restricted access. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the north and south is in grave danger. The war in Sudan is a fight for liberty. We must all be diligent in ensuring that the Sudanese government is held accountable for its efforts to suppress freedom.

#### A Christian Response to HIV/AIDS

In 2002, I had the honor of serving as Project Director of the Samaritan's Purse Prescription for Hope Conference in Washington, D.C. Among the more than 900 people who attended this event were Senator Bill Frist, Senator Jesse Helms, and the former Administrator of USAID, Andrew Natsios. Two years later, *Foreign Affairs* magazine described this event as a “turning point in American AIDS policy” (January/February 2004). The intent of the conference was to mobilize the church worldwide to become actively involved in the fight against AIDS and to create greater awareness among government leaders about the role of Christians in stopping the spread of the disease.

Many of our AIDS programs are conducted in partnership with the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). This work is changing lives and preventing the spread of AIDS, especially among youth. We are training thousands of church leaders who in turn are teaching their congregations and communities how to avoid HIV by making healthier and more responsible choices about their sexual behavior. To reduce stigma, church congregations are being educated to better understand the facts about the disease and those who suffer from it. Thousands of church members are providing compassionate homecare to vulnerable households because of the information they received.

From 2004 to 2006, our Church Mobilization Program in Mozambique worked with 49 communities, 24 denominations, and 310 churches in the Chicualacuala District. A recent statistical study on our work by the Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health provides evidence that significant behavior change can and does take place when people are empowered to choose abstinence and faithfulness.

The practice of abstinence increased among both unmarried males and females. The percentage of females who reported choosing abstinence was 34% in 2004 but by 2006 the number had increased to 49%. The figures for males were also impressive: 34% in 2004 versus 41% in 2006. No matter what your beliefs are, there is no way to deny that this behavior change will have an impact on the spread of the disease. I want to emphasize that this was accomplished in just two years in one area.

In addition to our prevention programs, we are actively involved in the fight against the widespread stigma that too often keeps people from receiving the physical, emotional, and spiritual aid they need. The Johns Hopkins study found that after our program was implemented in Chicualacuala, the percentage of vulnerable households receiving care rose from 57% in 2004 to 84% today.

I know that there is strong resistance in some quarters to the programs of Christian organizations that promote abstinence and faithfulness. I have seen firsthand the prejudices that organizations like ours face in applying for grants for these activities. However, from a public health perspective, the data proves that when people embrace the values of abstaining before marriage, remaining faithful to one partner, or reducing their number of partners, their risk of contracting HIV decreases significantly. To do anything less than to try to share these values is to deny that people have the power to make choices. Teaching this kind of sexual responsibility will significantly reduce the spread of the AIDS pandemic.

A recent study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) suggests that abstinence and faithfulness in marriage programs have not made a significant impact (*Spending Requirement Presents Challenges for Allocating Prevention Funding Under PEPFAR*, April 2006, GAO). We strongly disagree with this for three reasons. 1.) The conclusions are extremely premature. Behavior change in societies does not happen in months. It may take a generation. 2.) The assessment is flawed, and the data is incomplete and shallow. For example, Mr. Chairman, we were interviewed in Ethiopia in late July 2005—before we had an approved work plan. We were not interviewed in Mozambique, however, where we had positive data on the effectiveness of our work. 3.) There is significant institutional resistance within the government, the academic community, and non-governmental organizations to the concept of teaching values. I have often heard that the teaching of values will not stop the spread of AIDS, but learning happens by repetition over time. A sufficient amount of time has not passed for anyone to make a judgment on the long-term effectiveness of these programs. Where would any of us be if our teachers had decided we could not read in the third grade and therefore stopped trying to teach us?

Faith-Based Organizations bring tremendous value to the U.S. government's assistance programs throughout the world—and especially in Africa. They are always on the frontlines of meeting human need. Because of our faith, we go to the far corners of the world, and we will continue to do it with whatever resources we have. Partnering with Faith-Based Organizations should not be about politics. It should be about leveraging resources and capacity for the greatest benefit to the African people. To not

wholeheartedly implement the spirit of the President's Faith-Based Initiative would be a disservice to millions of desperate people.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today.